

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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Pins and Thimbles.

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Archaeologists at ASM Affiliates, subcontractors to the Cosmopolitan Hotel Project, have found metal needles and pins, and a couple of metal thimbles at the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

Hand sewing is an art form that is over 20,000 years old. The first sewing needles were made of bone or animal horns, and the first thread was made of animal sinew. Iron needles were invented in the 14th century. The first eyed needles appeared in the 15th century.

Sewing was learned by girls very early, and taught at schools and at home. It was a needed skill because before the invention of the mass production of the sewing machine in 1850, all garment making and mending was done by hand. In the 1800's, it was common to designate a room in the house as a sewing room.

In letters that Juan Bandini wrote to his son-in-law Abel Stearns, one can see the need

Bandini's daughters had for sewing tools and fabric. Some of their garments were purchased, but some of the garments (for both family and servants) were made locally by hand. In a letter written in 1839, Bandini asked Stearns to send him some striped cloth to make shirts for the Indians. In another 1841 letter, Bandini wanted some fabric because his daughters made five blouses, and needed more material to make more. He also sent two pieces of white cloth to his daughter Arcadia, and he wanted to make sure she made herself a blouse or a skirt.

In May 1840, Bandini says that he needed Stearns to send him "6 yellow metal thimbles, not gold, medium size, because his family really needs these items." In 1841 writing from San Juan del Rio, Bandini asks Stearns for 200 pesos in blankets and striped cloth, and another 200 pesos in thread and needles, cotton and linen. He adds that Stearns should not think that Bandini is abusing Stearns' kindness because he is going to marry Bandini's daughter Arcadia soon, that this is business and that Bandini intends to pay him as always. In

a letter written from San Diego in 1858, Bandini worries about Arcadia's health because she had an accident and Bandini says that he is confident Stearns will take good care of Arcadia, and that the needle fragment that is stuck in her foot will be taken care of.



Thimbles found at the Cosmopolitan Hotel site are made out of metal, maybe copper or some alloy, and they are shorter and thicker than a modern one. The pins and needles don't look like the ones we use today. ASM archaeologist are busy preparing a final report on the excavations, and will do the last analysis of needles, pins and thimbles to tell us more about this mundane, daily activity.

